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BULGARIAN PEASANTS' OPPOSITION TO COMMUNIST MEASURES TO COLLECTIVIZE AGRICULTURE

According to the 1940 census (Trud, 24 December 1948), Bulgarian agricultural lands were distributed as follows among 1,194,904 owners:

Properties below one hectare -- 157,693 owners, comprising 13 percent  
 Properties from 1 to 5 hectares -- 676,264 owners, comprising 65 percent  
 Properties from 5 to 10 hectares -- 276,377 owners, comprising 15 percent  
 Properties above 10 hectares -- 85,570 owners, comprising 7 percent.

After the Communist seizure of power in September 1944, the so-called unity of the peasants and factory workers was proclaimed. From the start, the Communists made every effort to liquidate the bourgeoisie, nationalize industry, commerce, and banks, and impose a Soviet-like constitution.

It required 4 years for them to accomplish it.

At the same time, they undertook the complete enslavement of the peasants with the aid of the following laws:

1. In 1945, a law governing the right to possess land. It forbade citizens to buy land, and allowed them to own no more than 20 hectares (except in four districts in the Dobrudzha where individual holdings could be 30 hectares).

2. A progressive tax law. Although this law was not aimed at the peasants, it had the goal of creating discord by favoring the small and medium farmers. All taxpayers possessing fewer than 3 hectares, five sheep, and one cow were exempted from income taxes. But this favor was accompanied by a considerable increase in indirect taxes (triple and quadruple) on articles of prime necessity, such as salt, kerosene for lighting, cigarettes, matches, etc.

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3. In 1947, the Nationalization Law. This law, without being aimed directly at the peasants, nevertheless allowed the expropriation of artisans' workshops in the villages, of flour mills, and of oil mills.

4. In 1948, the Law for the Expropriation of Agricultural Machinery, by virtue of which only the state, the kolkhozes, and the agricultural machine stations were authorized to possess such machinery. Machinery was bought from the owners at ridiculously low prices.

5. The Law of 3 December 1948, which suppressed tenant farming under the pretext of applying the socialist principle (abolishing the exploitation of human labor).

6. In 1948, the Law of State Goods, Article IV of which authorized the Council of Ministers to dispossess farmers to meet the needs of kolkhozes and sovkhoses. Under the guise of legality, anti-Communist farmers could be dispossessed and given uncultivated lands in exchange for their tillable holdings.

7. The Two-Year Plan Law (1947-48), which provided for the planning and regulation of the kolkhozes; sovkhoses, and agricultural machine stations.

The steps taken by the Communist government provoked a bitter reaction in the Bulgarian villages. Resistance increased and was manifested in agrarian and socialist opposition. This struggle, touched off in August 1945, lasted until September 1948. The peasants took a very active part in it at the cost of numerous victims. In it, they lost their chief, Nikola Petkov, who was hanged by the Communists in September 1947.

The Communists did not hesitate to use every means to pattern the kolkhozes after the Soviet model. However, up to the end of 1948, that is, to the eve of the Fifth Communist Party Congress, the raising of cereal crops was done solely by private enterprise, despite the millions of levas granted the kolkhozes as subsidies.

According to statements made before the Fifth Communist Party Congress (held from 18 to 24 December 1948) by Dobry Terpeshev, then Minister of Planning, the production of the kolkhozes and sovkhoses together did not represent more than 8 percent of total agricultural production, 92 percent being furnished by the independent owners.

The Bulgarian peasants' hostility to the regime led the Stalinists to wage open war against the peasantry.

The new policies were expressed in the Five-Year Plan, which provided (during the period 1949 - 1953) for the "voluntary" creation of 4,000 kolkhozes, taking in 3 million hectares and 60 percent of the landowners, although there were, at the end of 1948, only 1,163 kolkhozes totaling 269,144 hectares and 73,569 members, as against an arable land total of 4,761,336 hectares with 1,194,904 owners.

The slowness of the sowing brought severe measures for requisitioning harvests. At the same time, faster sowing was insisted upon.

The directives of the National Council of the Fatherland Front emphasize, among other things, that "the lands of farmers who refuse to sow and work them will be confiscated and given to the sovkhoses, kolkhozes, or landless peasants. These farmers will be judged according to the law of economic sabotage" (Trud, 26 February 1949).

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There were serious difficulties. Now, according to reports in the Communist press, it is established that the number of kolkhozes had been doubled by the end of 1949.

In 1950, the collectivization campaign was intensified. This allowed the government to obtain, 3 years early, results not expected before 1953.

The decrees and laws relative to collectivization were as follows: decree of 22 March 1950 governing spring planting; decree of 13 April 1950 governing the quantities of agricultural products which must be sold to the state; decree of 15 April 1950 fixing the dates for tobacco planting; Communist party circular of 20 April 1950 ordering the mobilization of departmental committees, central and outlying, for the purpose of requisitioning the harvest under the prescribed terms; National Conference of kolkhoz members on 7 May, designed to set up model regulations for the kolkhozes; ministerial decree of 20 May 1950 for the requisitioning of agricultural products under the terms provided for the 1950 harvest; decree of 19 June 1950 by the Presidium of the Assembly, directing the awarding of medals to kolkhoz members who achieve exceptional success in planting and stock raising; ministerial decree of 21 August 1950 concerning the requisitioning of grapes.

The champion of the movement to collectivize was V. Chervenkov, President of the Council of Ministers. In his report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, presented on 7 and 8 October, he emphasized:

"The peasants, collectivized or not, will deliver to the state 29 percent more produce in 1950 than in 1948, a bumper year, and about four times more than in 1949."

The manner in which the requisitioning has been effected appears in his report: "Decisive measures have been taken against kulaks and saboteurs, as well as against those who have not fulfilled their obligation to the state: their produce was seized."

In many regions, notably those of Burgas, Gorna Oryakhovitsa, Ruse, Shumen [now Kolarovgrad], etc., the party cells and the regional soviet were accused of having yielded to "kulak" pressure, because they had asked a lowering of the quotas prescribed by the plan, since these had been thought too great: "The cells and the regional soviet of the Stalin region have underrated the kulaks' resistance. They have not understood that the kulaks are trying to prevent the small and middle farmers from making deliveries to the state and are pushing the latter into the front ranks of the struggle while remaining in the background themselves" (V. Chervenkov, in Novo Vreme, No 10, 1950). Thus, all the Bulgarian peasants have now been designated en masse as kulaks.

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